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and Social Services

[General publications]

[G-6] Toronto's work activity  
project for welfare recipients;  
summary of an evaluation report.  
1973.









Queen's Park  
Toronto, Ontario

[General publications] [G-6]

Toronto's work activity project for  
welfare recipients; summary of an  
evaluation report.

March 15, 1973.

Work Activity Report Summary

Attached is a copy of the summary of the first  
Evaluation Report of the Toronto Work Activity Project.

The program is designed to help welfare recipients  
find permanent, well-paying jobs through education  
and training.

The complete text is available through the Ontario  
Book Store, 880 Bay Street, Toronto M7A 1N8.

For further information on the evaluation, contact:

Dr. Larry Lundy  
Senior Research Officer  
Planning and Research Branch  
Ministry of Community and Social Services.  
Telephone: 965-5089.



# TORONTO'S WORK ACTIVITY PROJECT FOR WELFARE RECIPIENTS:

## SUMMARY OF AN EVALUATION REPORT ON THE FIRST YEAR

PREPARED BY THE ONTARIO MINISTRY OF COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL SERVICES

The Community Employment Development Program is the work activity project of the Department of Social Services of the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto. It is designed to develop the work motivation of long term recipients of social assistance. Upgrading classes and work assignments are provided in a human environment designed to foster maturity and interpersonal competence. The objectives are to qualify recipients for retraining, strengthen their job seeking efforts and enable them to hold jobs. The 150 recipients who applied during the first eight months (November 1971 to June 1972) were followed-up at the eleventh month (September 1972). The Project is cost shared with the Ontario and Federal governments under the Canada Assistance Plan. The teachers' salaries are paid by the Board of Education of the City of Toronto. Mrs. Barbara Nease was engaged through the Research and Planning Branch of the Ontario Ministry to collect and analyze the data and prepare this report.

### The People

The work activity participants are the rejects of other helping systems. Their backgrounds are marked by physical, psychiatric and learning disabilities, family deprivation, institutionalization, and contact with a variety of rehabilitation and social agencies. At the point they enter the program, most would fall into the potentially employable rather than the employable category. It is apparent that a new approach is essential to meet the needs of this many-problem group





and promote their independence. Mental illness, drinking problems, and the need for basic literacy are mingled with extreme feelings of inadequacy. Some with long histories of psychiatric treatment are not emotionally prepared to function away from a supportive setting although academically they are capable of entering retraining programs. Others have been involved with social agencies almost since birth and take dependency for granted. Some are withdrawn while others go from crisis to crisis.

Social Problems of Participants	
	(N=110) Percent
Time on assistance over two years	31
Previous institutionalization	48
Grade 8 or less at admission	85
Contact with social agencies	38
Family problems	34

Problems in relating to other people are paramount in this group; many are so paralyzed by their own situations and fear of failure that they cannot see beyond themselves. They need to learn how to function in a group.

#### The Program

Some are in the upgrading school first; others start in work and later go to school. Admission to and termination from the project formally depends on being involved enough in the work activity to receive the incentive allowance. A sliding scale incentive allowance paid to





work activity participants depends on their attendance, effort, initiative and leadership qualities. It ranges from 3 to 50 dollars a month.

Most of the work projects involve service to others. Basically the participants volunteer to help others. Two work supervisors oversee the men who are working in the warehouse repairing donated furniture and appliances. Some new furniture such as tables is being built. Other men work on a rented truck picking up and delivering donations. Some are repairing city owned houses. Women sort and repair used clothes. Some participants do maintenance work at the emergency residence for homeless families and occasionally at a hostel for men. The counsellors also supervise some of the participants--working on assignments in district welfare offices and day nurseries. Some who are not ready gain confidence by working in the W.A.P. office under close supervision. A noonday meal is prepared by another group for program members; the charge is 25 cents. The experience of buying and preparing food gives these participants knowledge about budgeting and cooking. One girl acts as a friendly visitor at a hostel. Another woman supervises a group of volunteers who are collecting clothes. Several with more education help the teachers by tutoring.

The most outstanding aspect of the Toronto Work Activity Project is the emphasis on experiences that encourage the participants to feel there is another way of life open to them which they can achieve by legitimate means. The same philosophy underlies the school and the work activity. Constant reassurance, reality testing, the chance to act rather than be acted upon, and the taste of success are used to raise and buttress self images battered by constant failure. Expectation

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rather than acceptance is stressed; aspirations are encouraged. The motto of the school is, "Happiness is finding you are not so dumb after all." The volunteer concept of helping others is basic to the project and some indicate they join for this purpose, "To help themselves by helping other people and build confidence." The work assignments are designed to promote a sense of usefulness in the workers as much as to provide work training.

### Results

To find out if change has taken place, the 150 people who voluntarily signed up for the program during the first eight months of operation (until the end of June 1972) were followed until the end of the eleventh month (September). They fall into three groups: the 40 dropouts who did not participate, the 81 terminations who took part in the work program but have since left, and the continuing 29 who were still active at follow up (the end of September).

It is unrealistic to expect that problems developed over many years can be solved in a short time. Nevertheless, the Metropolitan Toronto Work Activity Project has demonstrated remarkable success in the follow up. Two-thirds terminated for positive reasons such as employment, retraining or continuing their education. At follow up two thirds were still off welfare. The fact that the majority had passed with little success through much more expensive helping systems suggest this is a valid approach to rehabilitation.

Although the overall dropout rate is high, it has declined substantially from 40 percent in the first four months of the program's operation to 12 percent in the next four months. Better organization,





more work placements and a more gradual flow into the project have cut down the number of non participants.

Once the social and emotional situations of the participants are more stable and their educational levels raised, what is the next step? Some have been motivated sufficiently to be admitted to retraining courses; others have found jobs. Nevertheless, increasing automation is phasing out more and more of the traditional jobs of the poor. A sense of usefulness seems to be what the people in the W.A.P. most crave. They welcome jobs that are meaningful to them. Many willingly work on evenings and Saturdays; their boredom and social needs are desperate. They have nowhere else to go where they feel comfortable.

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